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USEU PLEASE PASS AMBASSADOR STEWART

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/13/2018
TAGS: PREL ODIP OFDP BO
SUBJECT: EXCHANGE OF NOTES ON AMBASSADOR'S DEPARTURE, STAFF REDUCTION

REF: A. STATE 26143
1B. MINSK 168
1C. MINSK 174
1D. MOORE-KRAMER E-MAIL (3/12)

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4 (b,d).

Summary

11. (C) During a meeting to deliver the U.S. response to a recent Belarusian diplomatic note, MFA representatives presented Charge with a new note informing the Embassy that Ambassador Stewart's return to Belarus can take place only after the return of Belarusian Ambassador Khvostov to Washington. MFA North America Department Head Sergey Sergeyev sought clarification on the number and status of U.S. diplomats in Belarus and told Charge that the MFA stood willing to work with the Embassy to agree procedures for coordination of U.S. diplomats' contacts with Belarusian officials and regional travel. End summary.

Ambassador Cannot Return Before Khvostov -- GOB

12. (C) Charge met March 13 with the MFA's North America Department Head Sergey Sergeyev and Counselor Andrey Rzheuusskiy to deliver the Department's response (ref A) to the MFA's March 8 diplomatic note (ref B) recommending the Ambassador's departure for consultations, cuts in Embassy staff and coordination of diplomats' government contacts and regional travel through the MFA.

13. (C) Sergeyev began the meeting by presenting Charge with a new diplomatic note expressing the Ministry's position at Ambassador Stewart's return "can take place no sooner than the return of Ambassador Mikhail Khvostov to Washington." Charge restated the Department's position that Khvostov was welcome to return to his duties at any time, and assured Sergeyev that he would pass the contents of the note to the Department. (Note: This diplomatic note and a translation have been sent to Ambassador Stewart and EUR/UMB via email. End note.) In a pull-aside following the meeting, Sergeyev told Charge that Khvostov had no plans to return to Washington at this time.

Sergeyev Asks for Clarification on Embassy Size...

14. (C) Following Sergeyev's presentation of the MFA's dipnote, Charge delivered points as instructed (ref A). After the points were conveyed, Charge noted that he had been in contact with both the Department and Ambassador Stewart

(ref D), exploring possibilities for the reduction of U.S. Embassy staff. Sergeyev inquired as to the number of diplomats and administrative/technical staff posted to U.S. Embassy Minsk. The Charge responded that all 36 American staff at Embassy Minsk held diplomatic titles, while Belarus' embassy and consulate in the U.S. had 14 diplomatic and consular staff and an additional eight technical/administrative staff.

...and Promises to Consult on Travel/Contact Procedures

¶15. (C) The Charge noted that though our relations are strained, we can address these issues in a respectful way. Sergeyev pledged the same approach and said promised to consult with the Embassy on procedures for U.S. diplomats' travel outside Minsk and contacts with government officials. In addition, Sergeyev promised to pass his points to his superiors and to provide a response when he could.

Comment

¶16. (C) Though he and his MFA colleagues are not decision makers in these matters, Sergeyev's question on the number of diplomatic and administrative staff at post is a sign that Belarusian officials are calculating how our staff numbers could or should be reduced.

MOORE